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ABSTRACT

The components and outcomes of the Meadows Principal Improvement Program, a principal development program initiated in Texas in 1985, are described in this paper. The program's functional components, are designed to improve the principalship in Texas. These include: (1) a preservice component which seeks to prepare new principals with a focus on instructional leadership; and (2) an inservice component which seeks to assist practicing principals in upgrading their instructional leadership skills and to introduce them to new ideas which can be used in leading faculties and educational programs. The preservice component is 15 months in length and includes a full time internship at the building level for 9 months. The inservice component is an annual program which consists of at least six colloquiums during the school year designed to keep the principals enthusiastic and motivated. Outcomes included improved agency networking and inservice support. An evaluation of the program involved the administration of the revised Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) to an unspecified number of regular principal interns and Meadows fellows. Each group held similar attitudes regarding the importance of principal functions. However, Meadows fellows tended to be more involved and adaptive and viewed their program more favorably than did their regular counterparts. A survey of an unspecified number of inservice workshop participants identified three program areas as most effective: school climate, instructional/curriculum leadership, and planning for improvement. One table is included. (LMI)

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Leadership Competencies and Perceived Training Effects: Meadows Principal Improvement Program

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ABSTRACT

Meadows Principal Improvement Program

The Meadows Principal Improvement Program has two functional components and a research/evaluation component. The functional components are designed to help improve the principalship in the State of Texas. These include: (1) a preservice component which seeks to prepare new principals with a focus on instructional leadership, and (2) an inservice component which seeks to assist practicing principals in upgrading their instructional leadership skills and to introduce them to new ideas which can be used in leading faculties and educational programs. The preservice component is fifteen months in length and includes a full time internship at the building level for nine months. The inservice component is an annual program which consists of at least six colloquiums during the school year designed to keep principals enthusiastic, motivated and supplied with ideas to improve the instructional programs at their schools. The research/evaluation component of the project seeks to explore the impact of the program and make suggestions from the data collected to improve the Meadows Program and possibly generalize findings that can be applied to standard administrative preparation programs.

Meadows Principal Improvement Program

The Meadows Program began in 1985, a time when the nation was becoming aware of the need for school reform particularly in relation to the role and function of the principal on the educational program at the building level. This description will review the program as developed at East Texas State University. The program has the cooperation and financial assistance of the Meadows Foundation of Texas, a foundation which has as its interest the Arts and Education in the State of Texas.

Description of the Program

The Meadows Principal Improvement Program has two functioning components and a research/evaluation component which are designed to improve the instructional leadership skills of principals in Texas. These functional components include an inservice component which is focused toward assisting practicing principals in providing the leadership necessary to improve instruction programs in their schools and a preservice component which is focused toward providing skilled teachers with the leadership skills necessary to make them competent instructional oriented principals. In general the program seeks to: (1) Increase the principals' leadership skill in motivating and managing staff to initiate and implement effective instruction in the schools; and (2) Increase the principals' skill and knowledge of emerging technical and professional education ideas which will make the school more effective in helping students to learn. In addition to the functional components, a research/evaluation component seeks to explore the impact of the

program and develop findings and recommendations that might be generalized to standard administrative preparation programs.

The program encompassing the preservice component is fifteen months long beginning in June and ending at the end of August of the following year. The participant begins the first summer by taking course work specifically designed to prepare the student for an intern-administrator's role by the end of summer school in August. The course work includes the following: The Principalship; Interpersonal Communications and Group Dynamics; Curriculum Development, Administrative Use of the Computer, and General Administration and Organization of Education. At the completion of these courses, the participant (called a Meadows Fellow) begins work as a full time administrative intern in a school under the direction of a selected principal who acts as both supervisor and mentor during the next nine months. While an intern, the Fellow also participates in additional course work to complete the certification process and the inservice colloquium series focusing on improving instructional leadership. At the conclusion of the internship in May, the Fellow returns to the East Texas State University campus for a second summer of course work which completes the requirements for a Texas Mid-management (principal/building level) Certificate.

This program began six years ago with a proposal to the Meadows Foundation of Texas to assist in the improvement of the instructional aspects of the principalship in Texas. The Meadows Foundation assisted by providing financial support. Most notable of this support was the $10,000 to $11,000 stipends to help support each of ten Fellows' salaries. Other programmatic support is also furnished by the

Foundation and includes support for attendance of the Fellows at professional meetings both in state and out-of-state. These professional meetings have included the summer workshops for Texas elementary principals and secondary principals and the NASSP or NAESP national conventions.

It is important to realize the Meadows Program has been developed parallel to, but somewhat separate from, the regular administration preparation programs that are offered by the department of educational administration. Six cohort groups of Meadows Fellows have completed the fifteen-month program. Each year until 1990 saw an increase in the number of Fellows in the program, with local school districts supporting the costs of the interns that exceed those contributions by the Foundation. In 1986 nine Fellows completed the initial year's program; this was followed by twelve Fellows in 1987 and fourteen in 1988. Seventeen participated in 1989 and nineteen in 1990. There are sixteen Fellows in the sixth cohort group which entered the program in June of 1991. Experience in this program suggests that the cohort appears to have maximum impact when the number of Fellows is between 14 and 18.

During the initial summer program, almost all course work is completed by the cohort group without other students involved in the cohort classes. As the Fellows continue their studies, they take course work with other students. However, the cohort group continues to provide support for interaction and ideas which are shared.

Among the most important features of the Meadows Principal Improvement Program are the following:

1. **Selection for the program on a competitive basis.** Candidates for the program are nominated by their sponsoring school districts and compete for the available positions in the program by considering academic achievement records, interviews, writing ability, and past professional performance.

2. **A full time internship for nine months in which the Meadows Fellow works closely with the building principal, who acts as mentor and advisor.** The traditional internship for the mid-management certificate is a one-semester experience which includes approximately 140 hours of internship experience. The Meadows internship arrangement provides many more contact hours than the traditional internship for the mid-management certificate. Also, unlike other interns, the Meadows intern normally serves as a full-time intern without classroom instructional responsibilities.

3. **Inclusion in a cohort group of students when beginning the program during the initial summer.** This group becomes a support group for the next fifteen months that provides support and advice during the formal studies and the internship experience. Experience has shown that this group continues as an informal support group as the student completes his/her program and takes on a more permanent administrative role. Thus, the new administrator has a network of colleagues that can provide a sounding board for ideas and sharing solutions to problems encountered. Following program completion, many cohort groups have scheduled meeting times on their own with no involvement by the program directors.

4. **A focused initial study on the principalship and related skills that will serve to prepare the student for the intensive internship**

emphasizing instructional leadership. The initial instruction is offered exclusively for the Meadows cohort and is arranged with the knowledge that the group will be filling internship roles shortly. In the traditional mid-management program, the student may begin with core courses; however, the mix of students enrolled in the traditional principalship course normally ranges greatly as does the course sequence.

5. **Specialized study in personal communications and interpersonal dynamics--an area which is taught by the counseling and guidance department.** This offering is not available to graduate students in counseling nor is it available to the traditional mid-management students. This course and the principalship study culminate with a retreat that involves an experiential learning activity: the Ropes challenge course. This activity focuses on leadership and communication and requires the application of skills developed during the previous five weeks (Vornberg and Harris, 1992).

6. **An introduction to and participation in the state and national principals' organizations.** The Fellows first experience in this regard is usually the second week of the summer, immediately after starting the Meadows Program. This exposure helps the new Fellow to relate readily to the principal's role and to observe in a professional setting the important issues confronting principals and their schools. An added benefit is the cohesiveness of the group that jells very quickly as a result of their traveling together. During the internship period, the Fellows attend a national principals' convention, either elementary or secondary. This experience widens their horizons for professional involvement and ideas beyond the Texas borders.

7. **Participation in the inservice colloquium series emphasizing the instructional role of the principal.** Each year this program includes six day-long programs to help the practitioner continue to grow professionally. Examples of program topics include the following: learning styles, teacher observation and conferencing, improving staff climate, improving discipline and classroom management from the principal's perspective, alternative assessment strategies, situational management for the principal, the effective schools' movement, and curriculum development and alignment. Programs for the current year include the following: strategic planning, site based management, the instructional leader's role in the effective school, teaming for effective instruction, school restructuring, and exemplary school programs.

Students in a traditional preparation program may attend these programs; however, in practice, most students in administration preparation programs are teaching during the day and are not released for this activity. In the Meadows program, the district and the participant agree that the Fellows will participate in all six programs.

Practicing principals are also in attendance at this colloquium series, which is the second functional component of the program. This series provides a continuing education experience for the active principals as well as the opportunity for the Meadows Fellows to come into close contact with a large group of principals in this professional setting.

Other Program Aspects

Efforts are made to continually improve the Meadows program. An advisory committee composed of 15 to 18 administrators from area

schools--including superintendents, assistant superintendents, instructional personnel, and principals--meets at least twice annually to discuss the program's relationship with local school districts and to develop goals for the Meadows program to help meet the needs of the districts. Approximately half way through the fifteen-month period, one committee meeting is held following a conference with the current interns who offer their reactions to the program. In addition, the results of a questionnaire sent to all cooperating superintendents and principals mentoring interns are available to offer suggestions, relate strengths, and identify areas needing improvement.

Generalized Program Effects

Interaction with Traditional Program

The program has been gratifying and productive and has become a very important component of the work of the department of educational administration at ETSU. While it has not been totally adopted by the traditional mid-management program (which most students take three to five years or more to complete), it has offered an opportunity to test some new course offerings and program structure. Those ideas which prove themselves effective can be extended to the traditional program.

Impact on Texas Education

At the completion of the program in which the current cohort is engaged, eighty-eight Meadows Fellows will have been prepared through this program to become principals with instructional leadership skill emphasis. Assuming a twenty-five year career for these individuals

as principals or other administrative roles, it can be conservatively estimated that they will impact 500,000 students as instructional leaders.

Agency Networking

Cooperation with other agencies is an important aspect of the program. The principal agencies that are closely involved in this program are the University, the Meadows Foundation of Texas, and local school districts that participate either in the preservice component or the inservice component or both. Officials of the Foundation are in close and regular contact. Its representative attends one or more of the inservice programs each year, are present at the introduction of the new group of Fellows, and recognizes the group completing the program at a luncheon each summer. The local school districts are involved by their nomination of potential Fellows each spring, their hosting and mentoring of individual Fellows, and their participation in inservice programs. The cooperating principal serving as the mentor to the Fellow is invited to attend the colloquium series and be with the Fellow when recognized at the luncheon in the summer. Also, the topics presented at the colloquium are approved by the Texas Education Agency for Management Leadership Training (required of all administrators). The program also networks with other principal centers through the National Principals' Center Network which sponsors the Principals' Center Conversation annually.

Inservice Support

The inservice component, described as a part of the Fellows' program, was designed to provide practicing principals with an opportunity to be exposed to leadership concepts and technical ideas

which could assist them in making productive changes in instructional programs. This component of the program is now in its seventh year of operation. Approximately 125 to 225 principals have taken advantage of this opportunity annually. Examples of the topics which have been presented in the colloquium series include: teaching cycles, planning for instructional leadership, developing and improving the school climate, learning styles, situational leadership, classroom/school control/management, interpersonal communications, alternative methods of measuring student progress, instituting the teaching of the work ethic, and teacher evaluation and conferencing, school culture, communications in instructional leadership, school restructuring, curriculum development, administrator's role in enhancing thinking skills, and emerging educational technology..

The colloquium series has enabled the Meadows Principal Improvement Program to become a cooperative endeavor with the local school districts, East Texas State University, and the Meadows Foundation of Texas. The programs were originally funded entirely by the Foundation's grant, but now are funded in a subscription manner by the districts which participate in the series. The advisory committee reviews the evaluation of the programs and provides much of the leadership in decisions concerning future programs.

Research/Evaluation Component and Program Effects

The research/evaluation component of the Meadows Project has sought to examine the results of the activity. Frank W. Lutz, a member of the educational administration faculty and director of the Policy Center for Elementary and Secondary Education, directs this

component of the program. An interim report has been developed each of the last three years (The evaluation data depicted is the result of the work of Dr. Lutz. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged). The data generated by these evaluations provide some insight into program effects, compared to the traditional principal certification program of ETSU.

Preservice Program Evaluation

Several instruments have been used to collect data related to the preservice program: (1) the Instructional Leadership Activities, Beliefs, and Characteristics of Principals of Effective Secondary School questionnaire (ILES); (2) a revised Leadership Behavior Questionnaire; and (3) a modified Work Environment Scale (WES).

The ILES (developed by Koger, 1987) was designed to investigate specific instructional leadership activities both in terms of how frequently the principals are engaged in the activities and how important respondents felt the activities were in providing instructional leadership. The survey focuses on seven major area or functions of work involvement of effective principals: (1) establish clear goals; (2) involvement of self with instructional improvement; (3) monitor teachers; (4) evaluate student process; (5) coordinate instructional program; (6) provide an orderly school environment; and (7) hold high expectations for staff and student achievement. The data collected were used to compare the Meadows Program Fellows with the department's regular intern program.

Both regular interns and Meadows Fellows expressed similar attitudes regarding the importance of six of the seven functions. In

general, their attitude reveals that all seven functions are important and that more should be done in each of the seven activities--indicating that more time and other resources ought to be allocated to concentrate on all seven activities. Although both groups thought all functions important, the Meadows Fellows attached significantly greater importance to the sixth function, which is "providing orderly school environment," than did the regular interns.

Behavioral differences were reported in three of the seven functions. Meadows Fellows involvement in functions: (2) involvement in instructional improvement, (5) coordinating the instructional program, and (6) providing an orderly school environment were empirically higher when compared to involvement of regular interns. In all functions except the third, (3) monitors teachers, the Meadows Fellows mean score was empirically higher, indicating more involvement than the regular interns.

Perceptions regarding leadership behavior were gathered using a revised Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Fleishman, 1960) measuring the two "classic" dimensions of leadership: i.e., consideration for subordinates and initiating structure. Data were gathered on both Meadows and regular interns. Significant differences between the two groups were found for two leadership qualities. The Meadow Fellows expressed a higher perception of adapting to new ideas and involving subordinates in decision making, when compared to the regular interns. No significant differences were found on other leadership qualities as measured by the LBDQ.

The academic environment of the Meadows internship program and its effects as felt by the Fellows was assessed with a modified Work

Environment Scale (WES) (Moos, 1981). The analysis indicated the Meadows Fellows perception of the program was exceedingly high. The results, when compared to a theoretical mean, by using the indicated group mean and standard deviation, indicate their perception of the program. Nine areas are examined by the WES: (1) *involvement* is characterized by the individual's personal perception of their involvement in the program. Based on the data the Fellows were highly involved (i.e. the upper 2% of the theoretically possible scores); (2) *peer cohesion* is a measure of the group's personal interest in one another, an area which was very high (i.e. the top 2%, and 4 standard deviations from the usual group; (3) *supervisor support*, i.e. "giving credit," "not talking down," "accepting criticism." was indicated to be high (top 15%, but with a narrow range; (4) *autonomy* measures ability to make one's own decisions and to accept important responsibilities (again in top 2%, but with wider variation); (5) *task orientation* suggests that attention to task is maintained and time not wasted (i.e. scores in top 2% or 4 standard deviations from theoretical mean); (6) *work pressure* is high, but falls about the middle of the theoretical population of the program; (7) *clarity* is characterized by high organization, clear rules, and responsibilities, (necessary in a program) this area was 1 s.d. above the theoretical mean; (8) *control* (too-much control could be undesirable) was 1 s.d. above the theoretical mean and 3 s.d. below highest possible; (9) innovation, or the ability to try out new ideas, did not score as high as would be expected (1 s.d. above theoretical mean) falling about center of a normally distributed population.

In sum, the Meadows Fellows tend to perceive their internship setting as better than the regular program when viewed through the

WES. The Fellows perceive more involvement, peer cohesion, supervisory support, autonomy, and task orientation. They perceive about the same pressure and clarity, less control, and somewhat more opportunity to innovate.

Inservice Component Evaluation

During 1990-91, the Inservice component of the Meadow Program conducted a total of six day-long workshop like sessions, and an assistant principals' conference. Approximately 1280 individuals attended the sessions on an inservice or part-time basis, of which 76% of the participants attended only one or two sessions. A survey of participants was conducted at the end of the year, collecting data from participants at the last session and randomly selected participants from earlier programs during the year. The survey solicited responses on 29 statements concerning specific activities and the degree of help the program series offered participants.

Based on the data collected, a high level of help was perceived in (1) setting clear student achievement goals, (2) staff involvement in setting goals, (3) supporting on-task instructional behavior by students, (4) supporting teachers in instructional innovation, (5) coordination of instruction, (6) working to improve school climate and general attitude about students and teachers, (7) insuring instructional planning and curriculum alignment, (8) communicating with teachers on staff development plans, (9) and planning for future needs of students. Areas which were not impacted as much by the inservice programs included: (1) school-parent-student communications on school goals, (2) facilitating teacher visits to other schools, (3) class visitation

activities, (4) promoting the improvement or replacement of incompetent teachers, and (5) expanding and promoting staff development for instructional technology.

In viewing the amount of participation in the workshop series, the greater the number of workshops attended the greater the amount of help that participants perceived to have received in six areas: setting school goals for student achievement, involving parents in the establishment of school goals, using information from evaluating teachers to plan staff development programs, work to coordinate instruction, ensuring that what is taught has been carefully planned, and planning for the future needs of students.

When the 29 items are grouped into identifiable areas, three areas were perceived to be very successful by participants: school climate; instruction/curriculum leadership; and planning for improvement. Although all nine areas fared at least in the "some help" range (above 2.0), the areas of insuring "on task" activity, development of goals, and staff development activity were identified to be in the mid-range, while the areas of teacher evaluation and improvement, school-parent relations/communications, and instructional technology were at the low end of the range (see table 1).

Table 1
Participant Responses to Program Impact
1990-91

Rank	Topic	Mean
1.	School Climate	2.67
2.	Instruction/Curriculum Leadership	2.50
3.	Planning for improvement	2.49
4.	Insuring "On Task" activity	2.43
5.	Development of Goals	2.39
6.	Staff Development activity	2.32
7.	Teacher Evaluation & Improvement	2.27
8.	School-Parent Relations/Communications	2.23
9.	Instructional Technology	2.19

Response choice: 1=No Help; 2=Some Help 3=Much Help

Findings

1. The Meadows preservice program has had a high degree of impact involving new principals in instructional improvement, coordinating the instructional program and in providing an orderly school environment. The attitude of the preservice Fellows is more open and involved with other building subordinates than students from the regular ETSU program.

2. The work environment for the Meadows Fellow is generally better than for regular ETSU interns. There is very high involvement, peer cohesion, support by their supervisor, personal autonomy, and task orientation in their Meadows internship settings.

3. The preservice program's success may be promoted by a combination of elements including: nomination by the district and selection on a competitive basis, the cohort group organization, the initial study of the principalship and intergroup dynamics skills and the high faculty/mentoring support during the internship.

4. The inservice program's impact on individuals is directly related to the number of workshops attended in the series each year.

5. Areas most impacted by the inservice program include: school climate, instruction and curriculum leadership, and planning. The areas of least impact are usually related to specific topics which are not targeted in the inservice program planning.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings these recommendations should be considered by programs developing principals with an instructional leadership emphasis:

1. More effective methods of selecting principal training candidates are necessary. These should include not only academic performance measures but attributes as attitude, openness, enthusiasm and commitment.

2. Better support from local school districts is necessary to make the internship experience the quality required in order to successfully impact principals' preparation. This support should take the form of full time internships for an entire school year, quality mentor principals who are highly motivated in assisting the interns, and the necessary funding to support such individuals as full time interns.

3. Preparation programs should reorganize to accommodate students in cohort groups providing professional and personal support for students while completing the program.

4. Interpersonal skills and group dynamics should be a major area of study and focus when developing skills, knowledge and attitudes for leadership.

5. Principalship candidates should have a wide variety of contact with active principals in professional and inservice settings while they are undergoing their professional studies.

6. Cultural diversity is an essential ingredient in good principalship programs.

7. Effective inservice program are necessary to maintain principals development as instructional leaders. These should focus on a variety of instructional issues and leadership processes which serve to motivate and focus the professional principal on instructional improvement. Inservice principals perceive that such activities are helpful.

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